



Kimberly A. Foster
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LOS ANGELES COUNTY COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

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APPROVED MINUTES

A Special Meeting of the Commission for Children and Families was held on Monday, **March 17, 2008**, in room 418 of the Vermont Corridor County Administration Building, 8300 South Vermont Avenue, Los Angeles. **Please note that these minutes are intended as a summary and not as a verbatim transcription of events at this meeting.**

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT (Quorum Established)

Ann Franzen
Susan F. Friedman
Helen A. Kleinberg
Dr. La-Doris McClaney
Tina Pedersen
Sandra Rudnick
Stacey Savelle
Dr. Harriette F. Williams

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT (Excused/Unexcused)

Carol O. Biondi
Patricia Curry
Rev. Cecil L. Murray
Adelina Sorkin
Trula J. Worthy-Clayton

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The agenda for the March 17, 2008, meeting was unanimously approved.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the February 4, 2008, meeting were unanimously approved.

The minutes of the March 3, 2008, meeting were unanimously approved.

CHAIR'S REPORT

- Vice Chair Franzen, chairing the meeting in place of Chair Sorkin, detailed suggested changes to the letter and survey to be sent to the faith-based community with regard to collaborative relationships with the Department of Children and Family Services and the Probation Department. **Commissioner McClaney moved that the letter and survey be approved and sent as corrected. Commissioner Friedman seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved.** Vice Chair Franzen reported that 67 percent of the faith-based surveys distributed to DCFS staff had been returned, and that the Probation survey would be back by March 27.
- The possibility of creating an Office of Independent Review within the county's Chief Executive Office to investigate child fatalities was discussed at a recent cluster meeting. As point person for the Commission's child fatality committee, Commissioner Friedman reported that she, Vice Chair Savelle, and Commissioner Biondi agree that an independent body would expedite investigations, since DCFS is often not the only agency that has had contact with a deceased child's family, and information can be very difficult to get from other departments. It took the Commission seven months simply to obtain a court order allowing members to read child fatality cases connected to the Probation Department, and Commissioner Friedman believes a high-level OIR would be able to get answers more quickly.

Before the committee can recommend a position on this issue to the full Commission, it must meet in person, following agenda and noticing procedures called for by the Brown Act, California's open-meeting law. Although the OIR topic came up at the Commission's March 3 meeting, Commissioners have not heard about it in full, and Commissioner Kleinberg asked DCFS director Trish Ploehn for details.

Ms. Ploehn agrees that the true value of an OIR lies in its ability to focus on all agencies with connections to a critical incident or child fatality. Cluster leaders, County Counsel, and the CEO's office are currently working to identify resources for such a body and its investigations, and are developing recommendations for protocols and scope. (Rather than investigate every child death, for example, DCFS is suggesting the OIR look only at cases involving the media, high-level personalities, or more than one department.) The OIR will be funded through the CEO's office, and the Board of Supervisors would need to approve \$600,000 in additional personnel items.

In developing her current budget, Ms. Ploehn said that her number-one unmet need was the embellishment of the department's risk management function, especially with regard to child fatalities. With no more money forthcoming—in fact, with everyone having to do with less—she may need to shift funds to create a more robust division.

Commissioner Kleinberg emphasized the importance of investigators going into the community and asking questions of everyone who dealt with the family and the deceased child; too often in the past, investigations have focused only on transgressions of departmental policy. She requested that the OIR be put on the Commission

agenda once everything is agreed on. If the item appears on an agenda for a cluster meeting, Commissioner Friedman must be notified and Commissioners must attend.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

- Ms. Ploehn will provide the Commission copies of the report on DCFS outcomes submitted to the Board of Supervisors last week, and will discuss it in full at the next meeting. She said that what staff, the Commission, and departmental partners have accomplished over the past couple of years is tremendously encouraging. She will also bring the results of the recent Federal audit of the child welfare system, to tie the results of those two reports together.
- On February 12, the Board of Supervisors approved the establishment of DCFS's last medical hub, at the former MacLaren Children's Center facility. Once it is up and running, by the end of this summer, the gap in hub coverage in the San Gabriel Valley will be filled, and workers will be mandated to bring all newly detained children to a hub for a medical/dental assessment and mental health screening.

Commissioner Kleinberg asked that Commissioners receive information about whether these assessments include screenings for disabilities in young children (legally required but not always done), as well as visual and hearing tests. DCFS medical director Dr. Charles Sophy is scheduled to appear before the Commission on April 7 and can address some of these questions, but Commissioner Kleinberg would prefer a separate talk on children with disabilities, perhaps in tandem with the South Central Los Angeles Regional Center's presentation scheduled for April 21.

- Celebration One, the graduation ceremony recognizing the achievements of youth aging out of foster care, is scheduled for June 4. All Commissioners are invited.
- State and county budget cuts are still under discussion. At present, the county is expecting cuts of 2.6 percent, with 5.6 percent cuts to DCFS. State cuts in child welfare services, once projected to be 11.4 percent, or \$25 million, have since dropped to approximately 3 percent. They have yet to be finalized.

Commissioner Kleinberg would like to place on the Commission agenda an examination of what these cuts mean to Title IV-E waiver implementation, and Ms. Ploehn would like an opportunity to connect the fiscal impact of the waiver to programmatic opportunities and progress that the department is making.

DCFS PREVENTION INITIATIVE

Angela Carter, deputy director of Service Bureau 4, reviewed the history of the county's conversations around the prevention of child maltreatment. Four years ago, these discussions led former DCFS director David Sanders to pursue prevention with the Commission, and a similar impetus has continued through the Chief Executive Office's Service Integration Branch, the Children's Planning Council, and other efforts. The three departmental outcomes adopted during Dr. Sanders' tenure are still the focus of DCFS work—safety for all children, a safe reduction in out-of-home care, and shortening timelines to

permanency—but the county now recognizes that these goals cannot be achieved by DCFS alone. Strong partnerships with both county and non-county entities are needed.

In 2003, despite its importance to vulnerable families at risk of entering the child welfare system, family support funding through the Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF) Act was cut by \$8 million. This spurred thinking about how county dollars might be leveraged with other investments, and what was being spent by non-county entities on prevention efforts. Discussions also focused on the types of supports that families need apart from counseling and therapeutic services, and how those needs can be addressed with limited county funds. Three theories of change were examined:

- **Isolation**—Stressed families may have no one to count on in times of trouble.
- **Family economic success**—Partnerships outside of child welfare may be necessary to raise families out of the uncertainty that poverty creates.
- **Family strengths**—How can families and neighborhoods come together to identify and solve their own problems?

DCFS has set aside \$5 million in net county cost (from the general fund) for a one-year prevention initiative demonstration project that will create linkages within communities to have an impact on these issues. The initiative will work with families at risk of coming to the attention of DCFS, as well to shorten the stay of families already known to the department. Of the \$5 million, 50 percent will be spent on primary prevention, 30 percent on secondary prevention, and 20 percent on tertiary prevention. No matter where families enter the system, community-based services division chief Harvey Kawasaki said, they will be offered a full spectrum of prevention services, supports, and activities.

The Board of Supervisors unanimously approved the demonstration project contracts on February 26, 2008, with four out of five supervisors expressing heartfelt support. A Request for Information had been issued on May 21, 2007, to existing agencies in each of the county's eight service planning areas, requiring qualifications in five arenas:

- At least four years of community partnering and collaboration
- Formal contracts (not memoranda of understanding) with other agencies
- The subcontracting of 10 percent of direct-service revenues
- Playing a lead role in developing and implementing community forums that engage parents and others in feedback and response
- Collaborating with at least one county department to resolve specific issues

A lead agency was identified in six out of eight SPAs. (SPA 2's Friends of the Family will mentor an agency in SPA 1, and SPA 8's South Bay Center for Counseling will mentor three agencies in SPA 7.) On April 8, an all-day meeting will take place at a Los Angeles hotel to discuss contract language, service category percentages, how multiple regional offices will work with one SPA, and how multiple SPAs will work with a single regional office. Also on the agenda are pockets in the various SPAs that have particularly high needs, and how they can be addressed. (Commissioner Williams expressed concerns about concentrating exclusively in small, rigidly defined areas, fearing that families

living just outside those areas may be refused services.) Families will be referred by entities other than DCFS—child care centers, schools, and so on—and the April 8 meeting will clarify how caseload limits will be determined and if referrals will be controlled to ensure a cross-section of ages, ethnicities, and so on.

Through this demonstration project, DCFS and the county hope to learn about best practices and how to replicate them, examine existing contracts and contracting processes, and discover ways to leverage philanthropic, private business, and other county dollars. The project is not meant to create new programs, but to leverage opportunities, expand networks, and enhance working relationships—elements that will ideally continue to exist once the yearlong project has concluded. Before any additional service slots or programs are allowed, they must have a sustainability plan, and 35 percent of budgets must be subcontracted within three months. This will ensure partnerships and connections with other groups so that clients receive the entire set of supports that they need.

Given the project's extremely short timeframe, Commissioner Kleinberg raised concerns about a meaningful evaluation of success, stressing the critical nature of collecting data from the beginning and knowing what questions need to be answered. Casey Family Programs, Ms. Carter explained, has sponsored a significant investment in the prevention initiative; its evaluation team is led by Casey's director of evaluation, Peter Pecora, who is working with Jacquelyn McCroskey, a USC researcher long active in the child welfare field. Ms. Carter will provide Commissioners with the draft evaluation plan, still awaiting input from community-based organizations. (DCFS is also asking the state for an extension in its PSSF contracts so that this project's 'lessons learned' can inform continuing efforts in client-focused service delivery.) In addition to the evaluation, Casey is assisting with communication and capacity building, and its staff are working with lead agencies and DCFS regional offices to help them be more effective. A contract person to work with faith-based organizations has also been requested.

The lead-and-satellite-agency design of the prevention project resembles that of First 5's \$50 million Partnerships for Families, and Mr. Kawasaki said that PFF's evaluation cycle is proving valuable in terms of what has been learned with many of the same partners. Healthy City is also looking at the density of services available within various geographic areas, and Casey has funded a DCFS request to be part of the Healthy City database so that staff, agencies, and residents can both add to and make use of that information.

Commissioner Rudnick congratulated Ms. Carter and Mr. Kawasaki for their efforts during the four-year odyssey to create the prevention initiative, which she sees as a fundamental change in the way DCFS does business. Vice Chair Franzen in turn thanked Commissioner Rudnick for her hard work in co-chairing the prevention work group that sparked much of this endeavor.

Commissioner Kleinberg asked that a discussion of the prevention initiative's evaluation appear on a Commission agenda when appropriate, to look at the eight partnerships and how clients are doing in each geographic area with regard to the project's strategies. She asked that a presentation on connections between the prevention initiative and the family

preservation program also be put on the agenda, along with issues around drug and alcohol treatment services.

VERMONT CORRIDOR ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF PRESENTATIONS

Ruben Mejia heads the **Department of Public Social Services'** Southwest Family District 83, housed on the third floor of the Vermont Corridor building. His is a CalWORKs district, with staff processing intake (between 700 and 800 individuals per month) and carrying an approved caseload of approximately 11,000. Staff also maintain separate intake and approved units for homeless participants, receiving up to 300 requests per month for assistance. As part of the CalWORKs application, individuals are eligible for food stamps and Medi-Cal, and may also link with the GAIN (Greater Avenues to Independence) office on Century Boulevard for employment services. Services for domestic violence, substance abuse, or mental health issues are accessed through GAIN workers; clients needing Medi-Cal only are referred to DPSS's Southwest Special District on Western Avenue. DPSS has the second-largest office in the Vermont Corridor facility, with 225 employees who include eligibility workers and homeless case managers, along with clerical and management staff. A co-located GAIN unit providing post-employment services to re-engage clients in the workforce brings the total DPSS staff to about 250.

Mr. Mejia praised the partnership and collaboration created by the employees of the four departments housed in the new building, relating the story of a DPSS client family who needed immediate service from DCFS and was placed together within hours. Management personnel from all departments meet regularly, and trainings will start next month, beginning with supervisors, on what each department does. The Linkages program—in which DCFS workers identify clients for expedited DPSS service—will also be implemented at this location, along with a further co-location of GAIN workers with DCFS staff making the referrals.

Jackie Metcalf explained that the **Child Support Services Department's** Division IV moved from El Segundo to this location. In February, its 180 employees had 8,467 active cases and opened 692 new cases that same month. Staff assist clients in establishing paternity, obtaining court orders for child support and medical support, and modifying or enforcing existing orders.

Dr. Curley Bonds is a psychiatrist with the Women's Reintegration Services program for the **Department of Mental Health**, which focuses on helping women released from jail reintegrate into society. The program was formerly run from the Augustus Hawkins Mental Health Center, and has 12 full-time staff and 7 trainees, mostly in the field, who currently have 40 active cases. (From the Lynwood jail alone, about 12 women are released daily, many with substance abuse issues, mental illnesses, and nowhere to live.) The majority of clients have been convicted of nonviolent crimes, and 80 percent are homeless; most are referred from homeless shelters. Staff provide transportation from jail, help clients reestablish benefits, and provide medication support and addiction counseling. A partnership is planned with the American Civil Liberties Union for record expungement, and Dr. Bonds also wants to offer parenting classes to prepare families for

reunification (60 percent of program participants have minor children). The program's two psychiatrists prescribe psychotropic medication when appropriate, schedule follow-up appointments, and transition clients to community-based clinics when they are stable. So far, every client has gotten into emergency housing, but their length of stay depends on the shelter. In the transition-age youth population, Commissioner Kleinberg noted, worries about a place to live often make it impossible for the homeless to address their addiction issues. Housing is a huge problem.

Chuck Tadlock explained that the **Department of Children and Family Services** merged its Hawthorne and Century offices into the Vermont Corridor facility, with 389 staff. The office serves nine ZIP Codes whose population is 50.5 percent Hispanic, 45 percent African-American, 1.5 percent white, and 3 percent other. In June 2007, the office caseload was 75 percent African-American, 20 percent Hispanic, 4 percent white, and 1 percent other. As of March 13, 2008, the caseload was 2,360, with an out-of-home care population of 1,302. Of those, 649 are placed with relatives, 364 are in foster family agency placements, 129 are in group homes, and 134 are in foster homes. Of 600 emergency response referrals, 35 children were detained.

Mr. Tadlock is very impressed with his colleagues within this facility, and is more positive about co-location than he has ever been. While a very depressed adult DCFS client waited for an emergency team in the waiting room, for example, almost the whole contingent from DMH came across the hall. Mr. Tadlock is also exploring imaging technology with the Child Support Services Department, to create paperless caseloads (promised but not achieved by the CWS/CMS computer system). The cross-departmental trainings being planned should facilitate even more collaboration, and a single customer service pamphlet is being considered for the facility, rather than one for each agency, to help route clients to needed services more efficiently.

A Subway sandwich shop may go in the building's storefront area soon, and a back area is nearly ready for child care services to be offered to staff. A facility open house for the community would be ideal, but space constraints make accommodating large crowds difficult. Arrangements can be made with nearby Christian Crenshaw Center, which charges for its meeting rooms, and Jesse Owens Park may also be a possibility.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

MEETING ADJOURNED